

Higher education opportunities in transition

Pursuit of college degrees remains possible in Europe

Story & photo
by Johnathan Walker

During the last year, various announcements have publicized the 'drawdown' of opportunities to seek higher education in Europe. The University of Maryland University College closed its four-year residential campus located in Schwäbisch Gmünd, Germany, in 2002. City Colleges of Chicago in Europe, offering an Associates of Arts Degree with 30 concentrations, will close its doors July 31. University of Maryland's University College in Mannheim, a two-year residential campus, plans to close in May 2004.

University of Maryland officials contend that the decision to close both the Schwäbisch Gmünd and Mannheim campuses was based on financial reasons attributable to declining enrollments.

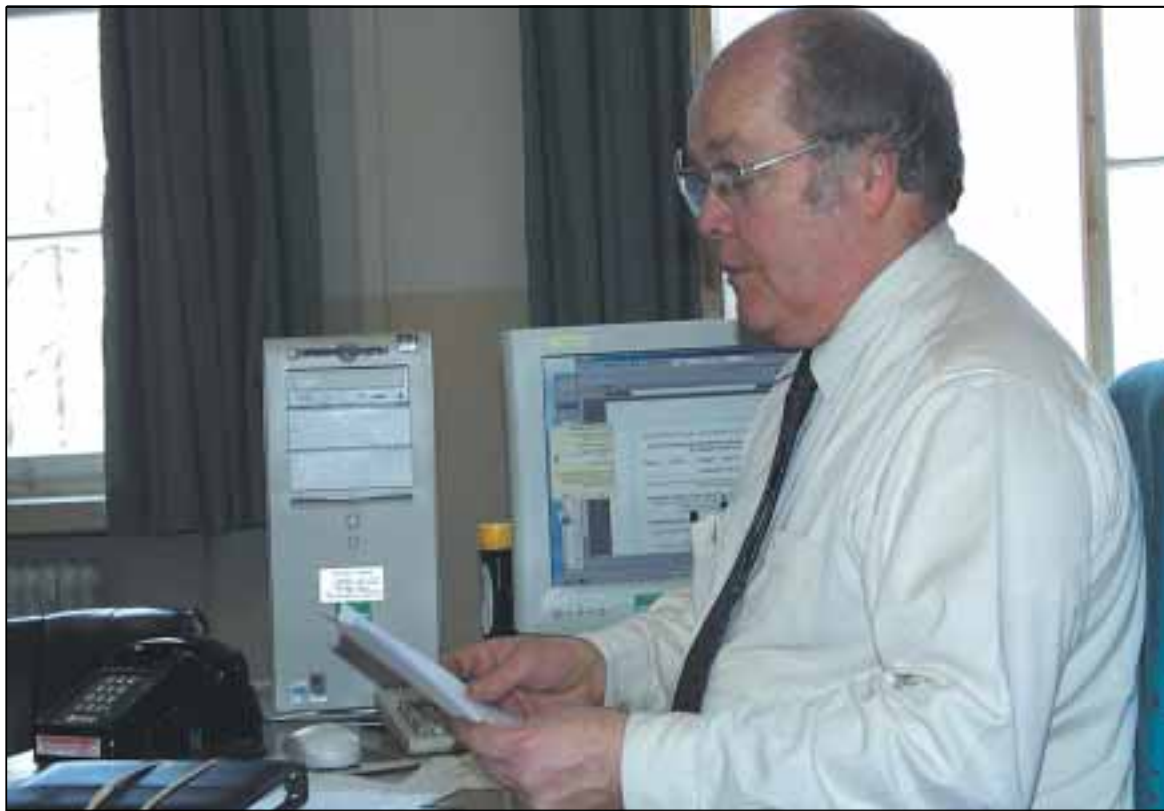
City Colleges of Chicago announced, without citing a specific reason, that it would not renew its contract to provide higher education in Europe.

College opportunities still abound

With all the closures it may appear that it's becoming difficult to pursue a college degree while stationed in Europe. "Not so," says Michael O'Beirne, education services officer for the 6th Area Support Group's Army Education Center.

O'Beirne said, "On one hand it's true that the University of Maryland's residential campus in Mannheim and Schwäbisch Gmünd will not be replaced. On the other hand, the departure of City Colleges of Chicago," which maintained exclusivity on distance education (DE) courses, "will not create a void because the University of Maryland will simply replace it."

He explained that DE courses are conducted by means of the Internet, allowing the student to use a computer almost anywhere, complete lessons and communicate with the instructor or fellow classmates. "The advantage is the ability to complete course work by going 'on-line' at just about anytime," said O'Beirne. This format offers an alternative means to taking courses for those who work shifts and are unable to attend class meetings.



As the 6th Area Support Group Education Services Officer, Michael O'Beirne oversees educational programs in the military communities of Stuttgart, Garmisch and Bad Aibling. O'Beirne remains upbeat about the current and future availability of opportunities for higher education in Europe.

"The most important thing is to have an educational interest or goal of some kind and then come see us."

Michael O'Beirne
6th ASG Army Education Center

For others who prefer the traditional classroom environment, several schools offer a variety of courses and programs, including the University of Maryland, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, University of Oklahoma and later this year, Central Texas College and the University of Phoenix. Some of these schools provide classes on Patch Barracks or Panzer Kaserne. Others require students to commute to the Mannheim or Kaiserslautern areas to attend classes, often on the weekends.

"Additionally, service members have the opportunity to enroll in courses from almost any U.S. university by using the DE format," said O'Beirne. "Service members can come in and say they want to take a class, for example, with the University of Idaho, University of Florida or University of Massachusetts. The choices of which schools to attend are very broad."

An item of immense importance concerns the institution's accreditation.

O'Beirne encourages all current and future students to verify that any institutions they have in mind are accredited, so when it comes time for transferring from one institution to another, students will avoid learning that their educational efforts will not be accepted by a school.

Guidance available

"People can come in even if they are just curious about their educational status. If they are in doubt about college, I encourage them to remember, part of our job here in the education center is to reduce the doubt," said O'Beirne.

"Many people on active duty, for one reason or another, made the decision to join the military instead of going to college," said O'Beirne, "A lot of those people begin their pursuit of a college education while in the military with us, and for them the education center is that first door to higher education."

Some people may not know how to start or continue the pursuit of a college degree and need a little help. When asked about the first step people should take, O'Beirne replied, "They should bring their questions and doubts to us and should not worry if they don't have the documents they think they might need."

O'Beirne continued, "The most important thing is to determine an educational interest or goal of some kind and then come see us." He emphasized that although the education center is an Army office, as a 6th ASG agency, it is prepared to assist service members of all military branches serving in Europe.

For more information about education opportunities in Europe call 431-2684/civ. 07031-15-684.